VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd in Washington.

A judge in Chicago has ordered actor Jesse Smollett to surrender his passport and pay $100,000 bail for filing a false police report.

The 39-year-old Smollett, an openly gay black man from the television hit "Empire," created a social media storm last month when he told police that two apparent supporters of U.S. President Donald Trump had struck him, put a noose around his neck and poured bleach over him.

After a three-week investigation, [Chicago police superintendent], the Chicago police superintendent, that is, said authorities determined that Smollett had paid two brothers $3,500 to stage the attack.

Risa Lanier is with the Cook County State's attorney's office. "As more evidence, such as text messages, phone records, social media records, bank records, surveillance video and the receipt from the purchase of the rope, was obtained by investigators, this investigation shifted from a hate crime to disorderly conduct."

Smollett posted bond Thursday afternoon and made no comment when he left the courthouse. His attorneys say the charges are "outrageous" and inconsistent with his character.

Venezuelan President Nicholás Maduro said Thursday he would consider closing the country's border with Colombia and would definitely shutter its border with Brazil.

He said, "I don't want to have to make a decision of those characteristics, but I am considering it. A total closure of the border with Colombia. I am considering it."

Maduro made the announcement in a televised interview shortly after a caravan of Venezuelan opposition leaders led by National Assembly President Juan Guaidó departed for the Venezuela-Colombia border to receive humanitarian aid for needy citizens over the objections of Maduro.

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A U.S. Coast Guard officer has been ordered held without bail on drug and gun charges while prosecutors gather evidence to support more serious charges involving what they portrayed as a domestic terror plot.

Lieutenant Christopher Paul [Hassa] Hasson, that is, was arrested last week. Police found several weapons, steroids and several thousand rounds of ammunition in his apartment.

U.S. Attorney Robert Hur says the number and force of the weapons recovered, coupled with the disturbing nature of Hasson's writings, appear to reflect a significant threat.

"Thankfully, we were able to prevent and avoid any loss of life in this case."

Federal prosecutors say that Hasson had compiled what appeared to be a computer spreadsheet hit list that included House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, presidential candidates and media members.

Pope Francis opened a landmark Vatican conference on the sexual abuse of children by priests on Thursday.

As Gracie Jerome of Reuters reports, the pontiff said the Church would have to "listen to the cries of the little ones that are seeking justice."

It's a global scandal that's rocked the Catholic Church. While his predecessors have been accused of failing to properly address it, Pope Francis says the Church must take steps to protect its most vulnerable members.

"We hear the cry of the little ones who ask for justice. The holy people of God look to us and expect from us not simple and obvious condemnations, but concrete and effective measures."

The pope's gathered nearly 200 church leaders, Vatican officials and experts, bringing the extent of the abuse to the forefront of Church policy after decades of cover-ups.

Gracie Jerome of Reuters.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Thursday the United States does not intend to ease its economic sanctions against North Korea until it is confident that Pyongyang has "substantially reduced" the threat it poses as a nuclear-armed country.

Speaking on NBC's Today show, the top U.S. diplomat said, "The American people should know we have the toughest economic sanctions that have ever been placed on North Korea, and we won't release that pressure until such time as we're confident we've substantially reduced the risk."

His comments came a week ahead of President Donald Trump's second summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Hanoi.

A federal judge overseeing the criminal case of President Trump's former political adviser, Roger Stone, has tightened a gag order against him and threatened Stone with jail if he violates it.

Judge Amy Berman Jackson stopped short of revoking Stone's bail but ordered him not to speak publicly about the case related to the investigation of Russian election interference, address it on social media or comment [it] on it directly or indirectly through surrogates.

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